DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 125 038 CS 501 445

AUTHOR Layman, Grace
TITLE Educational Drama Projects in Newfoundland.
PUB DATE 74
NOTE 13p.; Unpublished paper prepared at Memorial University

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Drama; Elementary Education; Individualized Instruction; *Inservice Programs; Program Descriptions; *Self Concept; Student Attitudes; *Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS *Educational Drama; Newfoundland

ABSTRACT

An experimental program of educational drama which is designed to help elementary children develop individually through self-expression is described. Six teachers who taught children ranging from eleven to thirteen in six different schools in a district in Newfoundland, Canada, were involved in a twelve week educational drama program. Components of the program included disciplined freedom through a double horseshoe seating arrangement, sensitivity exercises, relaxation and movement exercises, and improvisation. Weekly group inservice training sessions and weekly individual meetings were held between the author and the participating teachers. At the end of the program, the author felt that participating children had improved in attitude and interest in school, had shared ideas with each other more frequently, were not afraid of expressing their own ideas, and were less disposed to accept without question what the teacher or textbook said. A similar program conducted in another district is also discussed; it was not as successful, possibly because of a change from a continuous inservice training program to an initial one-week intensive training program. (MKM)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED125038

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

EDUCATIONAL DRAMA PROJECTS IN NEWFOUNDLAND

Grace Layman
Memorial University

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Grace Layman

TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER

Introduction

Educational Drama, as used in the context of this report, is an approach to learning and a method of teaching designed to develop the unique individuality of children. As a result of the child's involvement in playing out everyday situations that call for decisions, cooperation, spontaneity, and creative imagination, he learns to think, concentrate, perceive, and so to understand himself better. Through the activities of educational drama, he thinks his own thoughts and expresses them in the way most appealing to him without being judged by an audience. He achieves a degree of success and self-approval not subject to the more critical views of those around him. This success builds the confidence that encourages him to continue, and gradually, his self-consciousness is replaced by an increased self-awareness of his own potential.

General Hypotheses

All children have creative potential, which is often not developed, largely because of inadequacies in school curricula and educational systems, in which many of the school-day activities are completely removed from their own interests. Within the educational systems something can be done to remedy this lack of involvement for the child and reduce the high percentage of the "turned off" school population. The meaningful learning that takes place in the natural play of pre-school children is often replaced by a less meaningful body of knowledge after they enter school. For many school children, inhibitions seem to occur between the ages of six and ten years. These inhibitions may become greater in proportion to the increasing amounts of imposed knowledge and the unrealistic standards of our educational systems. One approach

CS 501 445

which can be made to give vitality to present school programs is to provide children the opportunities to use and develop their creative abilities to express themselves in terms of their own experiences through educational drama.

A Proposed Program in Educational Drama

In this paper, I will outline educational drama projects which I have conducted in Burin-Marystown, Newfoundland, Canada from 1968 to 1972, and in Baie-Verte, Newfoundland in 1968. Similar projects were carried out in New South Wales, Australia in 1969 and in Charlottesville, Virginia in 1973.

In each case, the program consisted of a twelve-week educational drama project conducted for elementary school children, aged ten to fourteen years, with the purpose of ascertaining the effects which drama had upon their attitudes in relation to an increased interest in learning. Six classes of children in this age-group were selected for each project. In each case, the teachers agreed to carry out a suggested program of activities in an organized way and to devote some time to in-service training.

Without any reference to textbook material, the children received an opportunity to express themselves and their environment, using their innate powers of concentration, imagination, sense impressions, physical movement, voice, and their general knowledge acquired both in and out of the school situation. I introduced into the selected classrooms a developmental series of drama activities, beginning with basic perception to create an awareness of themselves through their five senses, and continuing through learned relaxation and disciplined body movement as a basic means of communication.

Such expression through movement tends to develop a degree of precision of thought, which in turn builds a confidence that encourages the children to speak and communicate in a more meaningful way. I found in these projects that unless their freedom was disciplined, the situation became chaotic. This leads me to believe that only a well-guided educational drama program will provide an enriching and learning experience for the participating children.

From my personal observations, the recorded observations of impartial referees, and a small statistical base, I am convinced that the following relevant changes occur in children exposed to a well-designed program in educational drama: an improved attitude of the child toward his educational experience; an increased pleasure through practical involve-

ment in the school program; a greater interest in the world around him and in current affairs; an increased enthusiasm and leadership because of his accomplishments; an ability to express himself in an acceptable fashion both to himself and to his listeners with an increased self confidence; a greater interest in questioning information provided him in the educational setting; and a greater desire to exhibit his own capabilities as an individual.

Project in Burin-Marystown, Newfoundland, 1968-1972

As distinct from the other three completed projects, this project continued beyond the established twelve-week program. I made follow-up visits to the area from 1969 to 1972 and was able to assess the effects on the participating students even after they had reached high school. As this was the first educational drama project which I conducted, I undertook some developmental research in an attempt to define those variables associated with educational drama and those related to the conditions for successful learning. I believed that success in educational drama would lead to a positive self-image which would develop conditions for effective learning in other areas of the curriculum. My goal in this first project, and in subsequent projects, was to change the classrcom environment so that meaningful curriculum development could occur. I attempted to study the effectiveness of the methods which were being developed, the value of feedback from students, the classroom behaviours of students and teachers, and the feasibility of using these methods under actual classroom and school conditions. The major emphasis was on seeking an understanding of the children rather than on prediction and control of their subsequent behaviour.

The Newfoundland school system was subject-oriented. Too much emphasis was being placed on written reproduction of facts dispensed by teachers through the lecture method and memorized by pupils for later regurgitation in written examinations. This rigid adherence to a tradition has a number of drawbacks: 1) it penalizes the thinking student; 2) it stifles originality, creativity, and imagination; 3) it restricts the student to one primary medium of communication, the written word, and proves a deterrent to those students who have ideas and can express them verbally and through active participation better than in writing; 4) many children do not see the relevance of much of their curriculum content to their own lives; 5) this lack of relevance causes those students who cannot achieve academic excellence through written work and memorization to lose interest and frequently to drop out of school at the first opportunity.

Hypotheses

Having become aware of this situation through my own teaching and university experiences in Newfoundland and Labrador, I resolved to collect evidence through this project to show that the situation in Newfoundland schools was not inevitable and could be improved considerably by involving the learners in the teaching process and by a more dynamic approach to the curriculum.

Through a program of what we call educational drama and spoken English in Newfoundland, objectives were developed in order to show that the proper implementation of such an organized program could have a desirable effect on the attitudes, aspirations, and academic achievement of elementary pupils, by giving the participating children an opportunity to: 1) express their feelings and emotions; 2) become totally involved in what they are learning by making knowledge acquired outside school relevant and supplementary to the more formal content in school; 3) enjoy the process of acquiring curriculum content through a more dynamic and vital approach; 4) identify, develop, and appreciate their own uniqueness as individuals and thereby to become aware of the uniqueness of others; 5) restore self-confidence and break the shell that has built up around them; and 6) generally develop their whole personalities.

Basically, I believed that educational drama would provide an opportunity for the development of individuality through self-expression. If competently taught, the program would help children to: 1) develop a high degree of concentration; 2) encourage creativity and imagination; 3) develop greater precision of thought; 4) awaken wider interests in learning; and 5) express the thoughts and ideas that have been created, and imagined, and in which the children have become absorbed.

Locale

In 1968, a number of classrooms in Newfoundland were chosen, and with the cooperation of the teachers, I undertook an in-service training program designed to help the teachers to initiate their own programs of educational drama as a special subject and also as a tool for teaching and learning in various subject areas. The curriculum was to remain unchanged as far as possible, but the approach to it was to become more creative and meaningful both for the teachers and for the children. As a result of this method, I predicted that the attitudes and aspirations of the participating students would be improved, and that through involvement they would think, speak, and write more clearly, thereby achieving

a greater degree of academic excellence. I hoped that some children would have new horizons of learning available to them by being able to associate their outside-classroom learning with curriculum subject matter, as one means of reducing the early dropout rate then prevalent in Newfoundland schools.

The Burin-Marystown area, then a relatively isolated part of Newfoundland, was chosen for the experimental pilot project for the following reasons: 1) it was a fairly compact area, facilitating travel and communication; 2) it had a variety of school types ranging from a one-room to a twenty-room school; 3) there was a wide range of professional training among the teachers, ranging from almost no formal university training to considerable educational experiences; 4) there were a variety of classroom situations ranging from one to three grades in the same classroom; and 5) the whole area previously had minimum exposure to the type of program in educational drama which was being presented to them.

Personnel

Arrangements were made with the Boards of Education through the District Supervisor, who interviewed the selected teachers and arranged for their participation in the project. He also obtained the consent of the principals involved. One teacher in each of six different schools was chosen to carry out the project. As far as possible, children ranging in age from eleven years to thirteen were selected, but because of considerable over-ageness in some classrooms some children fourteen years of age and older were included.

The teachers were very enthusiastic and interested in improving their teaching methods. They displayed a willingness to accept innovations in their methods of teaching, seating arrangements, and in the less formal atmosphere that is necessary in an educational drama project. Typically, classrooms had been arranged in a very formal way, with the teacher's desk at the front of the room, and the student desks lined up rigidly in rows. Altogether, 132 children in six classes were involved. The children for the most part participated willingly in the activities. Only in rare cases did over-aged children refuse to participate on the grounds that the activity was "childish". A more rigid adherence to the eleven to thirteen age grouping would have been more conducive to 100% participation among the children.

The Program

Educational drama is the kind of subject area which cannot be specifically outlined in detail, as the activities and program must change according

to the situations that present themselves. However, the twelve-week project was planned according to what could reasonably be accomplished in that time under constant supervision. The project continued for the remainder of that year with the 132 children in the six classes combined.

The aim was to re-activate the child's innate desire to express his ideas in the form most effective for him. For some children, reading and writing was just not an effective form. Each child had to have the opportunity to develop his own personality through the program so that he could realize his own individual uniqueness and become confident in his self image without being made to feel "different" from the children who were more gifted academically. I drew up a program to achieve these goals, so that each child would develop certain characteristics.

1) Disciplined Freedom. In a double horseshoe seating arrangement, an innovation in seating patterns in the Newfoundland schools, children had a maximum of space so that they could all move with expression without interfering with each other, either physically or mentally.

2) Sensitivity. As individuals within the group they were given exercises to develop an awareness of themselves through the use of their five senses. These exercises allowed them to develop perception of how they could listen with a combination of their senses, and utilize the senses in various collective and individual guided activities.

3) Relaxation and Movement. A relaxed body helps the mind to concentrate on the on-going situation and to free itself of external stimuli, which leads to natural and spontaneous expression. This has to be learned, and it can be best done through appropriate activities. In order to communicate with a degree of thought and accuracy, teachers and children had to learn to use this basic means of communication of body movement. Since each exercise is initially individual, the children became aware that people around them were doing other things, because each child was imagining and concentrating on his own individual exercise.

4) Improvisation. When the child learns to express himself through movement with a degree of precision and meaning, he begins to substitute self-awareness for self-consciousness. The confidence which results encourages him to speak and express himself verbally as well as non-verbally.

Exercises were done step by step: an individual alone, then groups of two children, then three, then five until children could improvise self-made, self-imagined, and self-created stories. They learned to verbalize their ideas to others in their groups. They had to cooperate, listen to each other, become sympathetic to each other's feelings and ideas, and to communicate orally. The above plan normally would cover a year's work, which the teacher would continue on her own at the end of the twelve-week project. In the Burin-Marystown project, far too much had to be done too quickly so that the teachers could at least see a sampling of the progress which they should make with the children after the formal part of the project ended. What actually happened was that preliminary work was not done adequately, which forced the teachers to repeat earlier steps, and caused the children to become bored and confused.

Procedure of the Project

The first step was to visit each class, meet the participating teacher, and arrange a joint meeting to outline the program and to formulate plans for its implementation. A series of weekly in-service sessions was held, the purpose of which was to outline the basic principles of educational drama and to demonstrate how the program would be conducted for the twelve-week period. During the group sessions, difficulties that had been encountered were discussed and suggestions were made to overcome them. There was considerable sharing of ideas in these sessions and mutual help was given freely. Weekly meetings were also held with each teacher in his or her own classroom. In these meetings, personal problems were discussed and suggestions were made to avoid a repetition of problems or false steps.

Class activities were then carried out to demonstrate effective ways of using the techniques learned in the in-service sessions. After the initial training period, the teachers became more involved in the project and their confidence increased to the point that they could carry out the project with a minimum of guidance.

A system of reports was set up to record the classroom activities and student participation and response. Each student was rated for interest, before and after the twelve-week period.

Conclusions

At first, there was a reluctance by teachers to employ what appeared to them a frill, thus taking time which might otherwise have been used to

pursue the traditional methods of teaching in which the degree of success could be measured by such means as written exams. As the project progressed, the participating teachers realized that their objectives could be achieved with greater satisfaction by employing the more dynamic approach. Another fear that the teachers expressed was the loss of control of their classes. They soon realized, however, that because of increased involvement by pupils, another type of discipline emerged, that is - self-imposed discipline. A third fear was that the local administration would be critical of the apparent disorder and noisy classrooms, that were to them disruptive of the school program.

However, towards the end of the twelve-week period the administrators had satisfied themselves that:

a) the school program was not suffering,

b) pupils were learning more effectively because of their greater interest and involvement, and

c) the anticipated disorder had not materialized.

The project has proved to my satisfaction that:

1) that children who participated in the EDSE program have improved in attitude and interest in school,

2) there is a greater involvement by pupils in sharing of ideas and in learning,

3) the participating teachers are convinced that pupils can learn more effectively if they, (the teachers), are not mere dispensers of information,

4) pupils are no longer afraid of expressing their own ideas,

5) pupils are less disposed to accept, without question, what the teacher or the textbook says, and

6) teachers have come to realize that this is a new concept of teaching, and one that they themselves can develop further with a reasonable amount of imagination and initiative.

All this points to the fact that educational authorities are open to innovation when they are assured that the children in their schools are being more effectively prepared to deal with the demands that modern society will make upon them.

Baie Verte, Newfoundland 1968

This project was conducted in a similar way to the Burin-Marystown project except for the following differences.

Locale

This area is a relatively isolated part of Newfoundland in which the teachers in one elementary school expressed an interest in devoting a full school term to this experimental project. There was a strong contrast between the setting of this program and the Burin-Marystown project as will be seen.

Personnel

Seven teachers in classes from kindergarden to grade 6 undertook the program. None of the teachers had previous training in the methods of educational drama, but all of them had a keen interest in a dynamic approach to teaching. The cross section of children included in this project ranged from 4 to 14 in age, and none of the six participating classes had a homogeneous age-grouping.

Procedure

Instead of a continuous in-service training program as happened in the Burin-Marystown project, this group of teachers received an intensive one-week training session. The project got under way at the beginning of the week of in-service training so that the teachers had the opportunity to try out on a daily basis what had been learned the day before. Each step was carried out for a specific period, varying for each grade level and depending upon class progress.

During the week, all six classes were visited at least once a day, when I gave demonstrations which the teachers observed and took part in. At the end of each school day, I met with the teachers and discussed the day's progress. We pointed out mistakes and offered suggestions to correct the mistakes for the next day. Since the intensive in-service training was reduced to one week, we tried to cover the same material which I had covered during twelve weeks in Burin-Marystown. Consequently,

the teachers were not so well prepared and undertook the program with considerable misgivings about their ability to achieve success. Using only the information gained in the one-week training period, most of the participating teachers continued to conduct the project for the full school term. I came to realize, however, that teachers did not always understand the philosophy and underlying purpose of the drama activities in which they had the children participate.

Conclusion

This project suffered from significant handicaps. There was a lack of adequate training and consultation while the actual program was in progress. The participating teachers had a minimum of basic training and lacked the background to enable them to improvise when they realized that the activities which they were directing were not appropriate for the age group with which they were working. Both teachers and children became frustrated when they reached the stage where they did not know what steps should logically follow those that they had completed. With declining interest among teachers and children, the participation in the project also grew less, and in some cases ceased entirely. Although the children in this project generally were less inhibited in speech than the Burin-Marystown children had been, their conversations were rambling, often irrelevant to the task at hand, and distracting to other children. They also had difficulty in becoming good listeners.

The results of this project were to a large extent negative as indicated by the teachers' reports. The chief factors contributing to this lack of success were inadequate knowledge on the part of the teachers; limited supply of source materials; a false assumption that children who were uninhibited were, by virtue of that fact, engaging in effective communication; the difficulty of the teachers being forced to absorb too much information in too short a time; and a lack of continuous consultant services to assess ongoing progress.

Summary

Within Newfoundland itself, I continued to follow up on the projects in Burin-Marystown and Baie Verte for an extensive period of time. I also made a series of recommendations to the appropriate educational officials for ongoing programs in educational drama throughout the province. These recommendations included preservice training for future teachers both at the undergraduate and graduate levels at the University; in-service training for teachers, principals, and school administrators through summer school programs, improved workshops,

regionally offered courses, and research and development projects. At the present time, there is a growing awareness throughout the province of the importance of educational drama because of the implementation of several of these proposals.

I was convinced that the same assumption which I attempted to test in Newfoundland could also be proven successful in other educational contexts. This led to my undertaking similar projects in New South Wales, Australia, during 1969, and Charlottesville, Virginia, during 1973. Although all the reports and statistical information for these projects are still being compiled, they appear to support the main assumptions of the two Newfoundland projects, and suggest that my belief in the important contributions of educational drama towards a child's total educational experience is well-founded.

THE MAGIC REALISM OF RHETORIC

Allen Selby
University of New Brunswick

I gratefully acknowledge that my household's electrical gadgets work well most of the time for I cannot repair my television set and I admit to not really understanding what makes my lights go off and on when I press the switch. It doesn't really trouble me that I am so ignorant of electrical matters. I live in confident assurance that the repairman is as near as my telephone. It is not as easy to feel so complacent about rhetoric. It is as easy to sense when a finely delivered piece of rhetoric "has worked" with an audience as it is to sense when it has not. Those of us who teach the language arts are called upon almost daily to explain why one piece of rhetoric "works" and another doesn't and woe be that hapless practitioner of words who cannot satisfactorily answer his student's questions.

This paper is an attempt to arrive at an understanding of the nature of rhetoric as an art form using the recent philosophic thinking of Suzanne Langer. One can hardly analyse the nature of rhetoric without touching upon its function. I hope to do both. This is no novel task. Teachers and critics of rhetoric have attempted it down through the ages. I shall endeavour to give this paper some historical continuity by citing instances where great rhetorical thinkers have shed light upon this vexing question.

One cannot help feeling privileged when he has been audience to a truly sublime expression of rhetoric. He senses he has been spectator to a mystical, magical, almost ritualistic happening. The charisma of the speaker combined with the flow of his language has inundated the listener and the result has been the creation of a symbolic event much more real and significant than the fleeting, oblique happenings of our day-to-day world. The speaker has used the tools of language and gesture to create that illusion of life which is inherent in all art. The result is a happening